

Evaluation shows Annie's Project participants build skills

The Situation

In 2011 a team of University of Idaho Extension Educators began teaching Annie's Project in Southwestern Idaho. The team held two classes, one in Marsing, and the other in Caldwell from January through February. The program was developed in the mid-west and was geared toward agriculture in that area. The Idaho Annie's Project team adapted the program to fit the more diverse agricultural operations present in Idaho. In doing this, our team wanted to determine if Annie's Project was meeting the needs of Idaho small and large scale agricultural producers.

Our Response

The University of Idaho Annie's Project team contracted with the Social Science Research Unit (SSRU) to conduct a project evaluation of the Annie's Project program in Idaho. The purpose of the evaluation was to assess whether participants in the Idaho program have been able to increase their role or involvement on their agricultural operation. In addition, the evaluation sought to determine the overall level of satisfaction with the program, and if participants have suggestions on how to improve future programs.

Program Outcomes

A telephone survey was used to conduct the evaluation. The survey was conducted in October 2011, eight months after completing the Annie's Project classes. Twenty-eight interviews were completed from Annie's Project participants, with a 84.8% response rate.

The results of the evaluation indicated that nearly half (48%) of respondents felt that Annie's Project had helped a great deal in their becoming a more knowledgeable agricultural producer, while 22% said

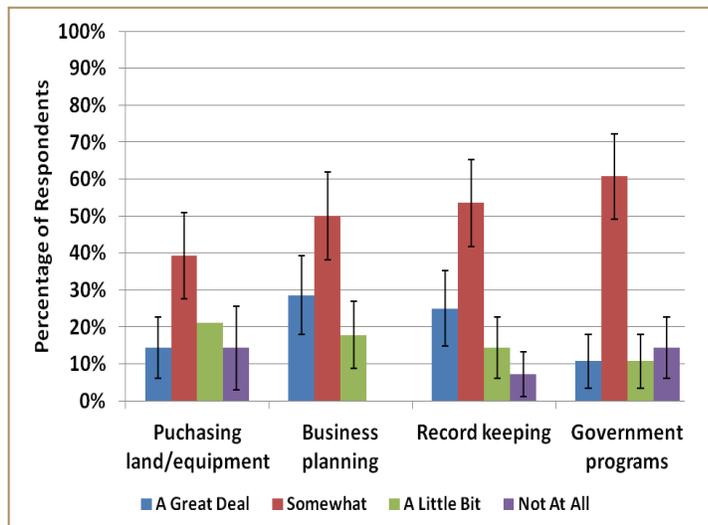


Annie's Project participants developing enterprise budgets.

that Annie's Project helped them in becoming a more active agricultural producer. Overall the evaluation indicated that 85% of Annie's Project respondents rated the Idaho Annie's Project program as "very good" and 93% percent of respondents would recommend the program to others producers.

In the area of farm business management, respondents reported the highest level of knowledge gained in the areas of business planning and record keeping. Over a quarter (28%) of respondents stated that they had increased their knowledge in business planning by "a great deal," while an additional 32% stated their knowledge had increased "somewhat." In purchasing land or equipment, 54% indicated their skill had increased "a great deal" or "somewhat." When asked about their knowledge regarding government programs to help their operation, 71% said their knowledge increased "a great deal" or "somewhat" (figure 1.).

Figure 1. Level of Increase in Knowledge and/or Skills in Farm Business Management



When the Annie’s Project participants were asked what tasks they have accomplished on their operation as a result of participating in Annie’s Project, the most common responses were “sought new marketing opportunities” and “using futures and/or options to make marketing decisions.” These results agree with other Extension Educators’ observations from Annie’s Project and women-only focused programs in other states. In Maryland, extension educators found in follow-up surveys that Annie’s Project participants increased their operational profitability an average of \$2,500 (JOE, Feb. 2012).

A common theme participants noted on the end-of-class evaluation, which was also echoed in the follow-up survey, was that participants liked the networking with other women agricultural producers. Several women producers have kept in touch since taking the class. Based on results from a Pennsylvania survey, building networks of women agricultural producers is important for successful farms. In a survey of 150 Pennsylvania women agricultural producers, 58% ranked isolation from other women farmers as considerable or moderate when asked “During the past year, to what extent have these been problems for you in making your farm successful?” (JOE, June 2009). Our survey also showed that 48% of women who participated in Annie’s Project increased their involvement on the operation. Overall, the research shows that women who participate in Annie’s Project bring greater financial security to their families, which in turn help farms, ranches and communities to be more sustained by improved natural resource conservation and enhanced food security.

References:

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